A CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT KENNEDY (9-2-1963)

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From Monday, September 2nd, 1963 CBS NEWS Walter Cronkite interviews President John F. Kennedy at the President's family home in Hyannis Port, M.A . Cronkite interviewed Kennedy as a part of the inaugural broadcast of the 30 minute edition of the CBS Evening News

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morning governor wallace moved in alabama to prevent a federally ordered integration of the first public school to be integrated in alabama it's put state police around the school as we've heard do you intend any federal reaction to that instantly well we've been in touch with the school board it was the school board that carried out the court order to provide for a integration of the schools there had been order so in a sense the governor's action comes i think as some surprise to the local community this matter will then of course be taken back to the federal court who will then make a judgment as to what action should be taken and then it will be up to the school board to implement that court decision and of course this is a matter because it is a federal court which the federal government will have a responsibility you know i'm hopeful it can be worked out by the people there that's our ambition but this is a matter for the federal court to determine and for the united states to implement in other words you don't intend any immediate action to get those students into school today or tomorrow i think we are checking now to see what the local school board is going to do i should think by the end of the day we'll know whether the school board is going to take the matter to the court they don't take the matter to the court then of course a responsibility will fall upon the department of justice do you have any idea what the department of justice could do in this particular circumstance they could take the matter to the federal court federal court would then issue an order which would be up to them if they issued an order compelling the schools to open then the order would have to be carried out we would hope it would be carried out by the local school board and that the governor would permit the federal court order to be implemented we'll have to see that over the next days mr president i don't like having to

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days mr president i don't like having to intervene in these matters this should be settled by a local authority it was being settled by them and i think that's the way it ought to be settled on the other hand of course we have a constitutional responsibility mr president uh with the tuskegee action today and a riot plaquemine parish last night in louisiana i'm wondering if it seems to indicate that perhaps senator stennis was right that the what looked like a very successful march on washington last week has instead got the south back up and uh and solidified them in their resistance you know there's been difficulties in the north too this week this last week so that this is a continuing problem the march was a episode an important one because i think it was an impressive manifestation of the strong desire of a good many responsible citizens for equal treatment this problem has been with us for 100 years and even before and it was going to be with us for a good many months and years to come negroes are 10 of our population to bring them into a full life in the american society with all that that means is going to be a long job and you're going to have difficulties in various states north and south east and west but they are here they are given the promises of the constitution and we have to do what we can to see that those promises are carried out that's the responsibility it seems to me of this generation of americans north and south east and west even though it presents us with a good deal a good

many harassments how seriously do you think this civil rights situation is going to affect your chances assuming you'll be the nominee of the democratic party next year in 1964. well obviously it's going to be a important matter it's caused a good deal of feeling i suppose against the administration in the south

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administration in the south also i suppose in other parts of the country whenever you have a issue upon which people feel so strongly quite obviously has its political effects so i would say it would be an important matter on the other hand i'm hopeful that both parties republicans and democrats will commit themselves to the same objective equality of opportunity i would be surprised if the republican party which after all is the party of lincoln and uh is proud of that fact as it should be i would be surprised if they did not also support the right of every citizen to have equal opportunities equal chance under the constitution there's no sense in blaming and of course on washington and that's a convenient place to blame it and i suppose that's one of the reasons why we're there but this is a problem which goes into every community across the country every family and everyone has to make a decision it's going to take time i think it's finally going to be done but we're trying to do something much more difficult than any other community country's ever done a good many of the people who advise us so generously abroad that have no comprehension of what a difficult task it is that faces the american people in the 60s but i think that the united states government i believe both parties and i think the great massive opinion is in favor of making progress along these lines and of course the most important area is finally going to be education which ties into jobs if you have education equality of education educational opportunity and you find i think gradually equality in employment and then you find the greater hump of the hill over passed do you think you'll lose some southern states in 64. well i lost some in 60 so i suppose i lose some maybe more in 64. i don't know it's too early to tell but i would think we were not sure that uh i'm the most popular political figure in the country today in the south but that's all right i think that we'll have to wait and see a year and a

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we'll have to wait and see a year and a half from now a year now not that long you're making any uh estimate as to who your opponent might be successful there's good many of them that's a good many of them got any choices to who you'd like to run against either to put the issues before the people or otherwise that's a great mistake i know some republicans chose me in 60 as their favorite candidate but so i don't know i can choose anybody i'll let them choose problems will become a little different when of course the republicans have finally chosen a candidate who has to run north south east and west stand on a platform of the republican party and it seems to me we'll have a clearer alternative what do you think the issues might be in 64. well of course abroad will be the security of the united states our efforts to maintain that security to maintain the cause of freedom at home i think it's going to be the economy the state of the economy jobs opportunity for all americans what we've done in the field of education we've done in the field of resource development conservation all the rest i would say the vigor of the american economy and the american society at home security of the united states abroad mr president this after all is labor day and there are almost five million americans who don't have very much to celebrate this labor day it's another day of unemployment for them uh do you see any real hope in a booming economy where we still have to have this many unemployed that in the next say five years a second term for you for instance there we can find a solution to this problem there's no magic solution that this suddenly is going to emerge what it is it seems to be a combination of actions which we're trying to take what we have to realize is to even stand still stay still we have to move very fast we have two and a half million more people working than when i came to office and yet uh a million and a half more people have come into the labor market now this is going to be

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the labor market now this is going to be made even more difficult because in the next two and a half years we're going to have about five and a half million people come with a labor market searching for jobs and about two and a half million of those won't have finished high school so this is very difficult when you talk

about the unemployed that statistic you first realize there are almost 70 million americans working and we're steadily increasing their prosperity but there are this very hard core of unemployed some of them are in the old coal areas which where they don't need those people now and yet so they can't find work and they're older the appalachian region particularly eastern kentucky west virginia parts of pennsylvania parts of indiana parts of ohio southern illinois then there's the steel unemployment in the big cities pittsburgh youngstown gary it's very difficult to find work for them then we have the combination of the older workers who have been thrown out of work because of technology and then we have the younger people coming in many of whom are uneducated now 50 years ago they could have either been a job on the farm or they could have been doing manual labor machines are taking the place of manual labor and we're steadily people are steadily moving off the farms because we're producing so much the answer it seems to me lies in a whole variety of program the tax cut i think is most important that would be 11 billion dollar tax cut in a period of 18 months we're not doing this just because uh though of course everybody would like to have their taxes reduced but the major reason is because of the lift it will give the economy the assurance will give us against another recession 11 million dollars in the economy multiplies it's spent and will bring a increase of nearly 30 billion dollars 30 to 35 billion dollars this can i think be the most single most important step in those areas where there is chronic unemployment i think vocational education aid to education so that these children will stay in the schools and this is something that every parent can do any boy or girl who leaves school before

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any boy or girl who leaves school before they finished are going to have a hard time in this world of ours in the next 10 or 20 years and area redevelopment those programs which put a special emphasis on areas of chronic unemployment uh these youth employment so particularly these boys 17 or 18 are out of school and out of work so we can take them and let them work as they did in the 30s in the ccc and these forests and all the rest these are the kind of things retraining particularly for the older men job retraining program therefore i hope congress will enact this kind of legislation so in answer to your question i believe that with the combination of the tax cut plus these other programs we can reduce that unemployment from the hot five and a half percent most importantly we can prevent it from being increased and i think we can get it under five percent in the period of two years two and a half years we can't do it by just saying uh it will be done on its own too many people coming in the labor market tuning machines are throwing people out mr president speaking of congress the the adam test ban treaty comes up to the senate next few days and everybody's predicting as i believe you are that it's going to pass by a very good majority but as all of the argument about it discussion about it and even suggestions from high places including former president eisenhower a reservation on on the treaty do you think that that this has hurt the spirit that prevailed in getting this treaty in the first place no if this if the treaty is so it's not substantial enough to stand discussion and debate then of course it isn't very good treaty so i don't uh i think what would be most desirable is after all this discussion and debate then to get a very strong vote in the senate i think a reservation be a great mistake i don't think president eisenhower used the reservation in the formal sense that he wanted the senate of the united states to put a reservation on the treaty because that would mean that the treaty would have to be renegotiated he was concerned that we would make it very clear that we had the right to use nuclear weapons in time

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the right to use nuclear weapons in time of war well of course we do have that right we've stated it the committee report of the senate foreign relations committee will restate it so i think that that will deal with the problem that concerned him otherwise i think a reservation would which would require us to renegotiate the treaty with nearly 100 countries my opinion would be it'd be better to defeat the treaty mr president the only hot war we've got running at the moment is of course the one in vietnam and we've got our difficulties there quite obviously the headline and the story in the new york times yesterday morning was rather an interesting one it said that the administration would try diplomacy in vietnam which i'd assume we've been trying all along what can we do in this situation which seems to parallel other famous debacles of dealing with unpopular governments in the past well in the first place we ought to realize that vietnam has been at war for 25 years and uh the japanese years i remember a good many people who said that two years ago that

wouldn't last six months a good many newspapers said that a good many local correspondents said it well it's still the war is still going in many ways it's going better that doesn't mean however that the events of the last two months aren't very ominous i don't think that uh unless a greater effort is made by the government to win popular support that the war can be won out there in the final analysis it's their war they're the ones who have to win it or lose it we can help them we can give them equipment we can send our men out there as advisers but they have to win it the people of vietnam against the communists we're prepared to continue to assist them but i don't think that the war can be won unless the people support the effort and in my opinion in the last two months the government has gotten out of touch with the people the repressions against the buddhists we felt were very unwise now all we can do is to make it very clear that we don't think this is the way to

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that we don't think this is the way to win much my hope that this will become increasingly obvious to the government that they will take steps to try to bring back popular support for this very essential struggle but these people who say that we ought to withdraw from vietnam are wholly wrong because if we withdrew from vietnam the communists would control vietnam pretty soon thailand cambodia laos malaya would go and all of southeast asia would be under the control of the communists and the domination of the chinese then india burma would be the next target so i think we should stay we should make it clear as ambassador lodge is now making it clear that while we want to help we don't see a successful ending to this war unless the people will support it and the people will not support the effort if the government continues to follow the policy of the past two months i hope that will be clear to the government it should be after all they've been conducting this struggle for 10 years and i admire what the president has done he's been counted out a number of times i'm hopeful that he will come to see that they have to re-establish their relationship but we ought to remember that they're the ones who are dying by the thousands and uh they're the ones who have to win this war or they're the ones who will lose it we can't do either we can assist them to win it and we can warn them against losing it but the united states is not the we don't have troops in the in mass who are dying by the thousands and uh we do the best we can to make it clear what policy they should follow but they have to decide do you think that uh this government still has time to uh to regain the support of the people with changes in policy and perhaps with in personnel i think it can if it doesn't uh make those changes i would think that the chances of winning it would not be very good hasn't every indication from saigon been that president jim has no intention of changing his pattern if he doesn't change it of course that's his decision he's been

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of course that's his decision he's been there 10 years and as i say he has carry this burden when he's been counted on a number of occasions our best judgment is that he can't be successful in this basis we hope that he comes to see that but in the final analysis it's the people and the government themselves who have to win or lose this struggle all we can do is help and we're making it very clear but i don't agree with those who say we should withdraw that'd be a great mistake that'd be a great mistake i know people don't like americans to be engaged in this kind of an effort 47 americans have been killed in combat with the enemy but this is a very important struggle even though it's far away we took all this made this effort to defend europe now europe is quite secure we also have to participate we might not like it in the defense of asia we're in a very uh desperate struggle against the communist system and uh i don't want asia to pass into the control of the chinese i would think that would threaten the security not right today but in the 1970s the late 60s that would substantially increase our problem increase the danger to india which is 500 million people and if that would join with the rest of the communist bloc they'd be that much nearer to us mr president have you made an assessment as to what president de gaulle was up to in his statement on vietnam last week no i guess it was an expression of his general view but uh he doesn't have any forces there or any program of economic assistance so that well these expressions are welcome but the burden is carried as it usually is by the united states and the people there but uh i think anything general de gaulle says should be listened to and we

listened you don't think that this is another prod to get together with you to try to call off president dugout from his kind of uh sniping at us well i mean president de gaulle follows a policy of what advancing the interests of france and uh that's uh

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that's uh and he's a man of uh great stature we're trying to advance the interests of the united states and we think the interests of the united states are tied up with maintaining the balance of freedom in the world what course makes america somewhat impatient is that after carrying this load for 18 years we're glad to get counsel but we would like a little more assistance real assistance but we're going to meet our responsibility anyway it doesn't do us any good to say well why don't we all just go home and leave the world to those who are our enemies general de gaulle is not our enemy he's our friend and candid friend and they're sometimes difficult but he's not the object of our hostility mr president the the sending of henry cabot lodge who after all has been a political uh enemy of yours over the years one point or another in your career and his uh sending him out to saigon might raise some speculation that perhaps you're trying to keep this from being a political issue in 1964. no i you know ambassador large wanted to go out to saigon if he were as careful as uh some politicians are of course he wouldn't have wanted to go there he would have maybe liked some very safe job but he's energetic and he has strong feelings about the united states and surprisingly as it seemed he put this ahead of his political career sometimes politicians do those things walla thank you very much we're fortunate to have him thank you sir yeah that was fine maybe just a little longer the answer than so i don't mind if they decide to edit any of this stuff yeah we'll probably have to do some some to get it in

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[Music] so got a helicopter stand by it laguardia to get in to avoid the labor day crash [Music] is indeed the time i spend no the uh lost oh gosh uh you you mean of uh of this shooting or of our whole program oh we figure i i think uh roughly fifty thousand dollars a day oh do you want me are you actually what we're doing just getting some kind of shots [Music] got your long lens on that sunfish out there we can all have one for christmas i've got one of those up on little lake in carmel new york where we go yeah they're a lot of fun those little surfing boards there thank you very much

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